



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Wednesday, November 5, 2003

Governor Ehrlich Announces New Anti-Crime Initiative - Project RESTART

Bold New Plan to Reduce Crime Provides 9,800 New Treatment Slots for Inmates

ANNAPOLIS – Governor Robert L. Ehrlich, Jr., today announced a bold new initiative to reduce crime and cut recidivism rates, which currently top 50% in Maryland, with a dramatic expansion of treatment and rehabilitation services to adults currently in Maryland correctional facilities. The project, Reentry, Enforcement and Services Targeting Addiction, Rehabilitation and Treatment (RESTART), will continue to emphasize enforcement, while adding much-needed substance abuse treatment, job skills training and counseling. The Maryland Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services created Project RESTART under the direction of Secretary Mary Ann Saar.

Last year, more than 15,000 inmates were released from Maryland prisons and returned to their home communities. With no changes to the current system, it is expected that more than half would be convicted for new crimes. Governor Ehrlich heralded RESTART as a project that will change the face of corrections in Maryland.

“The expansion of treatment and education for inmates in our correctional system is an innovative way to reduce crime, and that's exactly what RESTART will do,” said Governor Ehrlich. “We will continue to provide excellent custody and control correctional services in Maryland. However, we must stop the revolving door that keeps inmates coming back into the system, when they should return home with the treatment services necessary to become productive members of society.”

This new direction represents a significant change for the Maryland Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services (DPSCS). Upon her appointment, Governor Ehrlich charged Secretary Mary Ann Saar with the task of creating a correctional system based on treatment and rehabilitation, in addition to custody and control.

“For years, we have carried out correctional services in the same manner, and we have been getting the same results – a revolving door that leads right back to prison,” said Secretary Mary Ann Saar. “I believe that Project RESTART is an innovative, yet prudent approach to crime reduction that is economical both in terms of human capital, as well as taxpayer dollars.”

Under Project RESTART, DPSCS will add 9,800 new programming slots to the toolbox of treatment and education services to fight recidivism. These slots are designed for programs that include academic training, including adult basic education and general equivalency diplomas, vocational and occupational skills training, employment readiness and substance abuse treatment.

Secretary Saar directed a staffing analysis of correctional facilities that evaluated the necessity of correctional positions. Based on the results of that study, a number of positions will become available for conversion to treatment, education and re-entry services.

The RESTART model calls for positions made available through attrition to be redirected to treatment and rehabilitation services, with no correctional officer losing his or her job. Project RESTART will have a three-year roll out that began with the inclusion of all wardens in the planning process. Secretary Saar expects initial shifts in staffing patterns to occur by January 2004. Project RESTART will be funded mainly by the reallocation of existing resources, which will occur through the institution of new staffing patterns.

Secretary Saar has begun meetings with members of the General Assembly this week to explain the new course upon which her department has embarked. She recently met with Senator Ulysses Currie, Chairman of the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee, who applauded the new approach.

"I am encouraged by the good common sense that this new approach in corrections exhibits," said Senator Currie. "We have a common goal: to ensure that those offenders who have been sentenced by the court to be removed from our communities are placed safely behind bars. At the same time, we must, in our own self-interest, help those who are coming back into our neighborhoods prepare for a better, and more productive life."

Today, DPSCS houses nearly 28,000 offenders. In Fiscal Year 2003, 15,300 sentenced inmates were released to their home communities. According to DPSCS statistics, within three years of their release, more than 51% of former inmates are likely to return to the Department's custody.

"We have a responsibility to do more than simply warehouse offenders," said Secretary Saar. "Under Governor Ehrlich's leadership, we are making a philosophical shift from simple custody and control, to a rehabilitation system that includes education and treatment. With the proper allocation of resources, Project RESTART will send ex-offenders back home with the skills and treatment they need to become productive members of their communities."

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